United Nations

Why an International Year for Tolerance?

With the end of the cold war, it was hoped that the focus of international action would shift to finding solutions to the various political, economic, social and environmental problems that have plagued the world for several decades. In many parts of the world, however, burgeoning ethnic conflicts, disintegration of States and the eruption of religious intolerance are exacerbating poverty and economic and social disparities, and destabilizing peaceful development.

These dangerous trends have helped to swell the number of refugees and persons displaced by violent conflicts to nearly 49 million worldwide. Most of these people live in harsh conditions and very often are a burden to the fragile economies of the host countries where they have sought refuge.

Striving to cope with a growing number of asylum seekers and migrant workers attracted by better economic opportunities, societies everywhere struggle to adjust to the challenges of multiculturalism. Unfortunately, the newcomers, who are of a different cultural background, are often victims of xenophobic and racist attitudes on the part of the nationals.

In the face of widespread and disturbing intolerance which leads to acute nationalism, extremism, discrimination and blunt disrespect for human dignity, the United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 48/126, proclaimed 1995 the International Year for Tolerance, requesting the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to assume the role of lead organization for the Year.

Objectives of the Year

The challenge facing the international community is to replace violence and social disharmony with a broad based culture of peace. This can be possible only if the spirit of tolerance is instilled into individuals and becomes an integral part of social discourse. The Year will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the principle of tolerance clearly established as a goal for the "peoples of the United Nations" in the Charter: "***to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours***". Tolerance, human rights, democracy and peace are closely related. Without tolerance, the foundations for democracy and respect for human rights cannot be strengthened, and the achievement of peace will remain elusive.

Through the leadership of UNESCO, the international community adopted a two-pronged approach to the achievement of greater tolerance: 1) a sustained campaign to mobilize public opinion and 2) an effort to produce a long-term impact in all areas involved with education for tolerance.

The objectives and activities of the Year for Tolerance are:

- ***To build public awareness.***

This will be done by stimulating media coverage of the reasons for violence and other manifestations of intolerance in the world. The main objective of the media campaign is to further understanding of the need for tolerance in today's world and the underlying reasons for proclaiming an International Year. A major target of the campaign will be young people, since youth will become tomorrow's principal actors in societies which are becoming increasingly multicultural.

1995 INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR TOLERANCE

– *To foster the participation of governmental and non-governmental cultural institutions as well as agencies of the United Nations system.*

So far, many States, through their National Commissions for UNESCO, have proposed to hold meetings, conferences and seminars, at the regional and international levels, to discuss and identify the causes and manifestations of intolerance in certain specific situations. Several United Nations offices and agencies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have agreed to take action to counter the rise of intolerance. Non-governmental organizations that have status with UNESCO have scheduled a series of activities for the Year involving young people, disadvantaged groups and the general public throughout the world.

– *To promote tolerance through education.*

Education based on respect for other peoples and the free exchange of information is essential. UNESCO has produced information materials and teaching guides designed to increase knowledge of international instruments defending human rights, in support of a recommendation by the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, June 1993) for educational measures to promote and protect the rights of people belonging to vulnerable groups.

– *To reinforce communication and freedom of expression.*

The creation of communication systems furthering the exchange and free flow of information and opinion is crucial. The media can also play a vital role in fostering greater tolerance by providing a less partial view of the problems in conflict situations.

During the Year, 29 UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, including the soccer player Pele, composer Jean-Michel Jarre and tenor Placido Domingo, will help spread the message of tolerance and mobilize support for the Year's initiatives.

UNESCO has proposed that the International Day for Tolerance be observed on 16 November, date of the signature of the organization's Constitution, which states that *"it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed"*.

CALENDAR FOR THE YEAR

Two regional meetings for the Year were held in 1994:

"Tolerance in Latin America", Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 12-16 September;

"Democracy and Tolerance", Seoul, Republic of Korea, 27-30 September.

The following meetings are planned for 1995:

"Tolerance in Asia and the Pacific", New Delhi, India, 17-22 March;

"The Problem of Promoting Tolerance in the African Region", Nairobi, Kenya, 27 March – 2 April;

"Tolerance and Law", Siena, Italy, 6-9 April;

"Pedagogy for Tolerance in the Mediterranean Region", Carthage, Tunisia, 20-21 April;

"Tolerance for Mutual Understanding and Peace", Yakoutsk, Russian Federation, 20-25 June;

"International Colloquium on the Problems of Tolerance Promotion", Istanbul, Turkey, October.

The coordinator for the Year is Mr. Sergei Lazarev, Chief of the Tolerance Unit, Sector of Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO.

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